

## To a Beloved Parish from Arrington

*"I want to be the brave one to climb up the mountain so close to God that I know what to do."* — Penny Stratton

I am the type of person who can be waiting for my flight to arrive at the airport and find myself in tears watching others say goodbye to each other. So to say the least, beginning to say goodbye is not easy for me.

On March 30th, Penny Stratton preached a moving sermon about her experience teaching Godly Play. She told the story of what goes on in Classroom #1 on Sundays from 9:00–9:45 a.m. and how St. Andrew's youngest members have invited her into a deeper communion with her Christian spirituality. Her story resonated with my own journey with this beloved community of St. Andrew's. When I came to St. Andrew's in September 2003, I thought it would be a short stop on my vocational path. I never imagined that the church on the hill of 135 Lafayette Street, Marblehead, would have become a beloved and transformative place for me almost five years later. After about two years of being with St. Andrew's, people throughout the diocese would ask, "So, where are you going next?" And with no thought I would reply, "I am staying at St. Andrew's." This change of heart was surprising, but reminded me of how the work of the Holy Spirit can so often show up in surprising ways. So in the fall, when I was encouraged to place my name into two search processes, I did so reluctantly, but I knew that I needed to open up to the mystery that is our journey with God.

My discernment was not easy. Until Penny spoke these words—"I want to be the brave one to climb up the mountain so close to God that I know what to do"—I did not have words to describe what my discernment process felt like, but she named it. And I will tell you this . . . I do not like heights!

Through much prayer, I began to see a call to work with Bishop Tom Shaw and priests and lay leaders in the diocese to shape a program for engaging young adults in God's work through the Episcopal Church. In the beginning of March, I accepted a position with the Massachusetts diocese to start a new program, the "Relational Evangelist Program." It will engage young adults, based out of different parishes and chaplaincies throughout the diocese, in the work of outreach and organizing and defining evangelism for the Episcopal Church. I am excited for the opportunity to envision ways to raise up the beauty and power of our tradition while discovering new ways young young adults can deepen their spirituality, build community, and make a difference through a diversity of communities. My last Sunday will be May 18th where we will have leave-taking ceremonies at both the 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. services and a celebration of ministry at 3:30 p.m. with a contemporary service, food, and music. I will complete my administrative duties in the following week of May 19-23 and will look forward to anyone dropping by the office.

I have given all of you my heart, so while leaving will not be easy, you will always remain in my heart. During the next month I will work with the Liturgical Arts committee to plan for the summer, and Margaret Eckman has filled a preaching schedule through June with wonderful people who will share their spiritual journeys. The pastoral care team will be commissioned to continue their phenomenal care of parishioners in need. Your wardens, Linda Billows and Dirk Isbrandtsen, continue to provide spiritual leadership that is both responsive and proactive and they want you to know they are available to talk.

St. Andrew's has been in a great deal of transition over the last several years. Some of you may feel concerned by the continued transitions. But, as I know so well from being a part of the leadership team at St. Andrew's for over four years, St. Andrew's strong leadership, with the support of the diocese, will move this parish into the next great phase of its journey and mission. St. Andrew's is a powerful and healing place and community. *(cont. ••* This parish has taught me the power of that community, and that God creates us to live in community. And as I have experienced again and again, our community supports so many of us to express our true nature. When we express this true nature, we mirror the essence of God. In this way, I have seen so much of God at St. Andrew's! Knowing you has revealed God in bigger ways than I ever could have imagined. And it has helped me find more of God, in myself, and in the world.

The Bantu people of Africa's word for this practice of community is "ubuntu." I have preached on it often. It is a way of knowing humanity—and therefore of knowing God. Ubuntu says, "A person is a person through other persons."

I am because we are. I am a person because you are a person. Archbishop Desmond Tutu calls ubuntu a doctrine of God. You have given me a profound understanding of ubuntu and you will continue to reveal God in powerful ways, inside and outside the walls of St. Andrew's, for generations to come.

With deep gratitude and love,

*Arrington*